



News Release

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Point Vicente Project Gets the Lead Out

Los Angeles (Special to Corps Environment) – In weather more suited for wintry London than sunny Southern California, Los Angeles District team members and major stakeholders celebrated the corps’ ability to get the lead out. Fog, rain and chilly wind failed to dampen the spirits of dozens of people who turned out at the Point Vicente Interpretive Center November 8, 2002, to mark the end of a project to remove lead-contaminated soil. Completion meant the return of a valuable educational and recreational asset to the enthusiasts who use the Rancho Palos Verdes site year-round.

Located on a scenic bluff at the southwest tip of Los Angeles County, the center hosts tours and serves as a scientific research center for the study of gray whales that migrate through the waters between Point Vicente and Santa Catalina Island.

At the ground breaking four months earlier (held in typical Southern California weather), U.S. Rep. Jane Harman gave “Thanks to all levels, especially to the local involvement. When we had to shut down what we had, it was devastating.” The center closed to the public in August 1999 when tests conducted during expansion showed elevated levels of lead in the soil. The cause of the lead was the former Army “Known Distance Rifle Range” used during the 1950s for small arms target practice for military personnel stationed at nearby Fort MacArthur.

Enter the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Los Angeles District. Under the Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) program, the corps worked with its partners to develop and conduct a project to remove the lead and return the site to the public. The project also served to establish and develop close ties with the local community.

“When city officials discovered the lead, they filed a tort claim with the Army for approximately \$3.2 million for damages and response costs,” said Tawny Tran, the district’s project manager for the Point Vicente project. “The total remediation project cost \$1.6 million. In effect, we saved \$1.6 million, gained good faith and trust, and ultimately built a great relationship with the city and the state.” The “great relationship” Tran refers to is the result of having all the players onboard communicating and participating early on. That process enabled the team to nail the baseline schedule at every milestone.

Like most projects, this one had its share of obstacles and challenges, but the goal remained clear throughout, and the project proceeded to completion ahead of schedule and under budget. The project team briefed the city council prior to the remediation process and interacted with the public at events like “Whale of a Day,” an annual event marking the beginning of whale-watching season. That event included a presentation booth, displays, brochures and newspaper and television interviews.

Visitors and docents attending the ceremony talked excitedly about the rebirth of the center and its grounds. One reminisced about a group that met “at that park bench right there every Friday night. We once had a mother and a baby whale come up below us, about 40 feet away, and just rest.”

“A lot of our visitors are kids from the inner city,” said Docents of Los Serenos de Point Vicente president Joan Barry, “some of whom have literally never seen the ocean before. Their visit here is their first time.” Rancho Palos Verdes Mayor John McTaggart called the educational and recreational resource “the most valuable asset the city owns.”

“The major reason for the project’s success,” Tran said, “was the close partnering among the federal, state and local agencies and the close collaboration from designer and remediation contractors during the planning and execution phases of the remediation.”



“Every time the corps has turned up, the area has turned greener,” said Rep. Jane Harman, at the project's ground breaking in June 2002.



Demolition of the retaining wall and landscaping of the area in 1999 revealed the lead-contaminated soil when expansion of the interpretive center began.



Fresh topsoil was put into place on the interpretive center grounds after removal of lead-contaminated soil.

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